

By Lyndon B. Johnson: 'The Vantage Point'

The New York Times begins publication of excerpts from Lyndon Baines Johnson's memoirs of his Presidency, to be published in book form by Holt, Rinehart & Winston on Nov. 7 under the title "The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969."

PREFACE

It has been said that the Presidency is the loneliest office in the world. I did not find it so. Even during the darkest hours of my Administration, I always knew that I could draw on the strength, support and love of my family and my friends.

But if I was seldom lonely, I was often alone. No one can experience with the President of the United States the glory and agony of his office. No one can share the majestic view from his pinnacle of power. No one can share the burden of his decisions or the scope of his duties. A Cabinet officer, no matter how broad his mandate, has a limited responsibility. A Senator, no matter how varied his interests, has a limited constituency. But the President represents all the people and must face up to all the problems. He must be responsible, as he sees it, for the welfare of every citizen and must be sensitive to the will of every group. He cannot pick and choose his issues. They all come with the job. So his experience is unique among his fellow Americans.

For better or worse, then, this is a book that only a President could have written. That is the sole excuse for its existence. I make no pretense of having written a complete and definitive history of my Presidency. I have tried, rather, to review that period from a President's point of view—reflecting a President's personal and political philosophy, a President's experience and knowledge, a President's aspirations and a President's response to the demands that were made on him.

I have not written these chapters to say, "This is how it was," but to say, "This is how I saw it from my vantage point." Neither have I attempted to cover all the events of my Administration. I have selected what I consider to be the most important problems, the most pressing goals and the most historic accomplishments of my years as President.

Finally, I have tried to avoid engaging in historical pamphleteering. I did not set out to write a propaganda piece in support of my decisions. My purpose has been to state the problems I faced as President, to record the facts as they came to me, to list the alternatives available and to review what I did

and why I did it. Others will have to judge the results on their merits. The struggle in Vietnam, for example, inspired one of the most passionate and deeply felt debates in our nation's life. That debate will go on, no matter what is written in these pages. History will make its judgments on the decisions made and the actions taken.

LYNDON B. JOHNSON
Johnson City, Tex.
April, 1971

THE BEGINNING

"WE'RE going to carry two states next year if we don't carry any others: Massachusetts and Texas."

The speaker was John F. Kennedy. The time was Friday morning, Nov. 22, 1963.

I had gone to the President's eighth-floor suite in the Hotel Texas in Fort Worth to introduce my younger sister, Lucia Alexander, to him. The President's spirits were high. He had come to Texas for politics, and the trip so far was successful—much more successful than I had expected. He had been warmly received everywhere he went. The crowds in San Antonio and Houston on the previous day had been large and enthusiastic.

That morning in Fort Worth he had already made two speeches, one to a large gathering in a parking lot across the street from the hotel and another to a Chamber of Commerce breakfast in the hotel. Money and power were represented at the breakfast, but the parking lot audience—made up of workers, mothers and children—gave me more assurance about the mood of Texas. Many of them had waited in a steady drizzle for more than an hour to hear him and to see Mrs. Kennedy.

"Where's Jackie?" someone in the crowd shouted.

"Mrs. Kennedy is organizing herself," the President said. "It takes longer, but of course she looks better than we do when she does it." The crowd loved this and roared its approval.

Now it was time to leave for Dallas. John Kennedy was thinking about the future, about the approaching Presidential campaign and the necessity for carrying Texas. No one, including the President, considered his re-election to be a cinch. In fact, the President's ratings in the polls were as low as they had ever been. But his reception thus far in Texas seemed to disprove the polls, and this fact was very much on President Kennedy's mind. The polls may have given him cause for gloom, but the people certainly did not.

That was obviously what he was thinking about when he remarked to me cheerfully that we would at least carry Massachusetts and Texas. They were the last words John Kennedy ever spoke to me.

I was just going out the door when he said this. I turned and smiled at him. "Oh, we are going to do better than that, Mr. President," I replied. He returned the smile and nodded.

On that note I left the room, pulling the door shut behind me, and went to join Lady Bird for the motorcade trip to Air Force II, which would take us to Dallas.

I shared the President's optimism that morning and I shared the sense of implied partnership in the coming campaign. Reports had been circulating in Washington that I was going to be "dumped" from the ticket in 1964. In fact, the Nov. 22 edition of The Dallas Morning News quoted Richard Nixon as predicting that under certain circumstances I would be "dumped." I believed these reports to be rumors and nothing more.

When John Kennedy first offered me the Vice-Presidential nomination, I asked him to be candid with me. If it was only a courteous gesture, I said, I wanted him to say so. He replied that he needed me to run with him if the ticket was to be successful.

For me, President Kennedy made his position quite clear in what was to be his next-to-last press conference, on Oct. 31, 1963, only 22 days before his death. He was asked: "Now, sir, assuming that you run next year, would you want Lyndon Johnson on the ticket and do you expect he will be on the ticket?" The President answered without hesitation: "Yes, to both of those questions. That is correct."

I considered President Kennedy a great and inspiring national leader and a compassionate man of vision and imagination. I was honored to serve him. My personal feelings toward him were those of admiration, fondness and respect—and I always believed that those feelings were returned in kind by the President.

Now, in Texas on this November day, Lady Bird and I were going to have a chance to return his hospitality. We were scheduled to fly that afternoon from Dallas to Austin for a fund-raising dinner. That night the Kennedys were going to be our guests at the LBJ Ranch. We were eagerly looking forward to the visit. The President had visited our ranch before but Mrs. Kennedy had not. I was particularly anxious for her to enjoy herself, and knowing how she liked to ride, we had made special plans for some of our best horses to be available for her.

MRS. JOHNSON and I arrived at Dallas's Love Field aboard Air Force II at 11:35 A.M. We were greeted by the local dignitaries and immediately joined the reception line to welcome the First Family when Air Force I touched down five minutes later. Behind the fence, and when the Kennedys stepped out of the plane a great roar